VISIT…

ONE LAST RIDDLE

CREDITS

Design:	David Eckelberry
Editing:	Kim Mohan
Web Production:	Sue Cook
Web Development	Mark Jindra
Graphic Design:	Sean Glenn, Cynthia Fliege

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and on the new edition of the Dungeons & Dragons game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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One Last Riddle is a DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® adventure for four to six characters of between 5th and 7th level. This short adventure should occupy a single evening's play.

PREPARATION

To use this adventure, you need the *Player's Handbook,* the *DUNGEON MASTER's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*.

Text in shaded boxes is player information, which you should read aloud or paraphrase when appropriate. Unshaded boxes contain information for the DM. Monster statistics noted in each encounter are abbreviated, but provide the *Monster Manual* page number where full statistics of common monsters can be found. Statistics for special monsters and NPCs appear in the text.

Individual encounters have an overall rating—their encounter level (EL), which is the challenge rating (CR) summation of each encounter element. The EL helps you gauge how difficult or easy any given encounter will be for your players' characters.

One Last Riddle can be set just about anywhere, within any campaign world. No map is needed for this adventure, because even the locations the characters travel to represent part of an event-driven series of happenings. To begin, just allow your player characters a moment's peace some evening alongside a road, and start the first encounter.

Adventure Background

The great sphinx Ujaset died last night. Before that time, the people of the surrounding land reported the occasional appearance of a translucent winged leonine figure in the skies above. According to local folklore, this beast sometimes halted the progress of travelers to trouble them with its clever questions, generously rewarding those who could answer the sphinx's riddles. Perhaps it's this legend that has drawn the player characters to the region.

Encounters

All of the following encounters are event-based, each one building on what has come before it.

1. A Riddle for You (EL 11)

In this encounter, the characters are drawn into the adventure. Assuming they're wise enough to avoid using violence, Ujaset starts them on their short quest.

The road stretches out as it has for the last hour. A cold wind brushes across your face, and while you look for its source, a low moan echoes out from in front of you. As you stare into the twilight ahead, a pale, flickering form can be seen.

At first you see the noble visage of a bearded man's head, twisted with sorrow. Then it's the body of a powerful lion, ten feet long and complete with swishing tail. Finally, great hawklike wings greater than any bird's come into view. The translucent form twinkles, coalescing into a single being.

"Now you dare the last riddle of Ujaset," moans the voice.

Allow the characters a chance to react and to identify the sphinx for what it is. They may not realize immediately that it is a ghost, but its translucent image should be a big hint.

As long as the characters don't respond with violence, Ujaset croaks out the riddle below. Refer to the tactics section should the party engage the ghost sphinx; once it has convinced them to be more reasonable, it returns to the riddle's oration.

"What is half of dragon,
but has not a wyrmling's strength?
What is half of canine,
but has not a mongrel's length?
What is it that is of two halves,
but has but half to stand on?"

The answer to the riddle is "*kobold*."

You can allow the characters a chance to consult, discuss, and even cast divination magic that may help (*augury* and *divination* may give a clue or reject an incorrect guess; access to *commune, contact other plane*, or *legend lore* would probably just give the correct answer). Ujaset gives the characters 10 minutes to offer their reply.

Ujaset is patient, to a point, but he's willing to violate some typical sphinx conventions about riddle games now that he's dead. Should the heroes prove able to answer the riddle, Ujaset beams at them happily. Read the text below.

"Excellent. You are just the sort of clever heroes that I was hoping to find tonight. As a reward, I'm going to offer you the chance to find the place where I laired only last night, where I kept on hand my personal hard of treasure. Of course, you're going to have to eliminate the disgusting kobolds that evicted me from my home."

Should they fail to give the correct answer, Ujaset bursts into a rage.

"Fools! I have no pity for the feeble-witted! Now listen closely, mortals, if you value your lives. To repay this slight you have done me, I shall demand a service! You shall go to my lair not far from here, and there you shall find and destroy the foul kobolds that infest it. Do this, or else I shall twist your minds with horror and torment your souls for the rest of your days!"

Regardless of the heroes' success, Ujaset wants his murder avenged, and he sees the party as a likely means to accomplish this.

After the riddle is done and Ujaset has charged them with their quest, he doesn't really have much to say. Read or paraphrase the following statements when appropriate.

- "Yes, I'm dead. Well, mostly dead. I'm a ghost—I think. No, I don't want to talk about what it's like. Do you want to talk about your short lives? I didn't think so."
- "Okay, I admit it's pretty humiliating to have been killed by kobolds, but there were a lot of them, led by a sorcerer. And they ambushed me while I was resting. Okay, it's still humiliating, I know. Let's not talk about it."
- "My lair? It's not far from here." Ujaset gives directions.
- "No, I can't go with you. Do you know how troubling it is to linger among you mortals, always answering your stupid questions?"

Ujaset will not accompany the PCs on their quest. He offers them directions to his lair, located only a few miles away.

D Ujaset: Androsphinx ghost; CR 12; Large undead (9 ft. long); HD 12d12; hp 90; Init +0; Spd 50 ft., fly 80 ft. (perfect); AC 22 (–1 size, +13 natural) or 14 (–1 size, +5 deflection, when manifested); Atk +18 melee (2d4+7, 2 claws, only affects ethereal creatures); SA Corrupting gaze, manifestation, malevolence, pounce, rake 2d4+3, roar; SQ Incorporeal, undead, rejuvenation, turn resistance +4, darkvision 60 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +10; Str 25, Dex 10, Con —, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 21.

Skills and Feats: Hide +8, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (history) +5, Listen +23, Search +11, Spot +23, Wilderness Lore +13; Alertness, Cleave, Flyby Attack, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Track.

Corrupting Gaze (Su): Gaze attack range 30 ft., victims make Fort save (DC 20) or suffer 2d10 points of damage and 1d4 points of permanent Constitution drain.

Manifestation (Su): While in standard ethereal state, cannot affect or be affected by physical creatures. Power allows ghost to become visible, but incorporeal; then it can affect and be affected by creatures on both Ethereal and Material Planes.

Malevolence (Su): 1/round can merge its body with a creature on Material Plane, possessing it for up to 10 hours as per *magic jar* cast by a Sor10 (Fort save DC 20 to resist).

Pounce (Ex): If Ujaset leaps upon a foe during the first round of combat, it can make a full attack even if it has taken a move action. Only possible against ethereal opponents.

Rake (Ex): If Ujaset pounces on a creature, it can make two rake attacks with its hind legs. Only possible against ethereal opponents.

Roar (Su): Can roar 3 times per day. First roar: All creatures within 500 ft. must make Will saves (DC 19) or be affected as by a *fear* spell for 12 rounds. Second roar in same encounter: All creatures within 250 ft. are paralyzed (Fort save DC 19 to resist) or be paralyzed for 1d4 rounds, and all those within 90 ft, are deafened for 2d6 rounds (no save). Third roar in same encounter: All within 250 ft. take 2d4 points of temporary Strength damage for 2d4 rounds (Fort save DC 19 to resist); any Medium-size or smaller creature is thrown to the ground and takes 2d8 points of damage (Fort save DC 19 to resist). Any stone or crystalline creature takes 50 points of damage from the third roar if within 90 ft. Magic items and held items can avoid damage with a successful Reflex save (DC 19).

Incorporeal: Only harmed by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magic weapons, and spells—and then only when manifest. Even when hit by spells or magic weapons, it has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. Can pass through solid objects at will. Moves silently and cannot be heard with Listen checks.

Rejuvenation (Su): After destruction, returns to life in 2d4 days if it makes a level check (roll 1d20+12) against DC 16. Can only be put to rest after the completion of its purpose.

Undead: Immune to poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, necromantic effects, and mind-influencing effects. Not affected by critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, ability drain, or energy drain. Immune to all effects requiring a Fort save.

Spells Prepared (5/5/5/4; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0—*cure minor wounds, detect magic* (3), *resistance;* 1st—*cause fear* (3), *command, sanctuary;* 2nd—*enthrall, hold person* (3), *zone of truth;* 3rd—*bestow curse, deeper darkness, invisibility purge, nondetection.*

Tactics: Attacking Ujaset is ultimately foolish, yet some well-intentioned characters may press the attack against the obviously undead creature. In that case, the ghost sphinx manifests every few rounds to blast the characters with its roar, its gaze, or to possess a character. Ujaset toys with the characters until they relent. Under no circumstances should Ujaset become tied down in an extended fight with the heroes (though even if this happens, the rejuvenation power returns the sphinx to "life" soon enough).

No Confrontation Required

The statistics provided for Ujaset hopefully won't be needed. Given the creature's formidability (reflected in its challenge rating), the characters should quickly be looking for other means to deal with the sphinx rather than fighting it. Yet the statistics are here just in case, and even if you don't need them now, you can make use of this unique creature in another adventure.

2. Just a Fight (EL 6)

As the characters travel toward the sphinx's lair, they stumble across the flight of a hungry wyvern out on the prowl.

Creatures: The wyvern descends out of the sky to snatch up prey and toss it to the ground—repeatedly, as needed. To the wyvern, it's all just meat tenderizing.

D Wyvern: hp 59; see *Monster Manual* page 186.

Treasure: Should the characters take the time to thoroughly search the surrounding land over the course of several days—or devise a magical means of communicating with a subdued wyvern, to allow them to discover a hillside or subterranean lair. Among the bones and skins inside lies a *brooch of shielding*.

Ad Hoc Adjustment: If your party is composed mostly of 7th-level characters, or is especially powerful given the characters' levels, provide the wyvern with a hunting mate, adjusting the encounter to EL 8.

3. The Empty Lair (EL 1/6)

The sphinx's lair is nothing more than a cave in the side

of a grassy hill. After the 10-foot-wide opening, it extends into an area 20 feet wide and 50 feet long with a 30-foot ceiling. The walls are of clean stone, the work of some clever craftsman who labored for the Ujaset long ago.

> The cave is dark.

A single young kobold was left behind here by his companions when the rest of them abandoned the cave after looting it. The kobold does his best to hide (+2 Hide modifier) when the characters enter. He doesn't know when or if his comrades are returning for him, but he hopes that it's soon. He's too afraid to risk the journey back to the kobold's camp in the wood.

Creatures: Jaalask, the young kobold who overslept.

d Jaalask: Kobold; hp 2; see *Monster Manual* page 123.

Tactics: Jaalask hides if he can, flees if he is discovered, surrenders if threatened, but fights when cornered.

Development: The heroes can easily defeat and kill the lost kobold, but in doing so they lose an opportunity to converse and progress further in the adventure (though a *speak with dead* spell may accomplish the same purpose).

Of course, the next problem in conversing with the kobold is that it only speaks a single language—a degenerate dialect of Draconic. Once that barrier is overcome, the kobold may agree to share what it knows in exchange for its life. Roleplay it or bring out the dice as you desire. Refer to the rules for NPC Attitudes on page 149 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The heroes can use Charisma checks or Diplomacy or Intimidate checks using the DCs on Table 5–4 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Bribes of 20 gp or more add a +5 bonus to the check.

The kobold reveals information once his reaction is indifferent, promises to guide the PCs to the kobold campground if friendly, and will even fight for the PCs if helpful.

- "I'm Jaalask. Who are you?"
- "By the great god Kurtulmak, I swear I swear I shall not hurt you. Will you make a similar oath by your god? Um, please?"
- "The Blackspear tribe is the strongest kobold tribe around. We're strong! The orcs around here fear us! And, uh, we're tough too . . . and we have Oppol. Oppol's got the best mojo in the land. He blasts the other tribes into bits, and we don't even have to fight them—not that we couldn't."
- "The Blackspear warband has camped a few miles away. Of course I know the way there!"

Treasure: Other than his halfspear, Jaalask is penniless, and the lair appears to be quite picked over. However, the sphinx kept a secret stash of its own treasure here that the kobolds failed to discover. The cover over this stash is especially difficult to find (Search DC 30), unless the PCs have learned where it is from Ujaset. Inside the stash is a suit of elven chain.

4. Blackspear Campground (EL 8)

The kobold warband camp is several miles away in the surrounding countryside. The kobolds lair in the open air in the middle of the forest, surrounding a campfire. The kobolds do not require the fire for light, but they make use of it for cooking, and for celebrations of their victories such as this one.

When the PCs come upon the kobold camp, they find the fifteen members of the warband dancing and parading in celebration. Only a couple members of the tribe are actively on guard, so it's possible the PCs can sneak up or attack the kobolds with surprise.

Creatures: A total of fifteen kobolds and two dire weasels represent the strength of the warband. One of the kobolds is a sergeant, a 3rd-level warrior. The warband leader is a trained combatant of the tribe, and might have been their chief someday. He is a 5th-level fighter.

d Kobolds (12): hp 2 each; see *Monster Manual* page 186.

d Dire Weasels (2): hp 13 each; see *Monster Manual* page 56.

d Kobold Sergeant: Male kobold War3; CR 3; Small humanoid (reptilian); HD 3d10; hp 20; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (touch 13, flat-footed 15); Atk +2 melee (1d6–1, halfspear) or +4 ranged (1d8/19–20, light crossbow); SQ Darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 8, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Drawing It Out

The trip to the lair or the campground can take as little as a sentence to describe, or you can make the journey into a part of the adventure. Whatever area you've set the adventure in, you can drop in a random encounter or two in order to add some action or lengthen the adventure.

There are plenty of good random encounters for a party of this level, many of which can be found in any climate or terrain. Add in a basilisk, a behir, a chimera, or a gray render for a classic monster-bashing. A pair of trolls or a small gang of ogres may be more interesting if you enjoy running humanoid opponents. Finally, there's always the chance that the heroes run into other travelers, whether they be merchants, other adventurers, or a medusa in disguise.

The stop in town presents equal opportunity for roleplaying encounters, and you can design urban side treks as you desire.

Skills and Feats: Craft (trapmaking) +2, Hide +9, Listen +2, Move Silently +5, Search +2, Spot +2; Alertness, Dodge.

Light Sensitivity (Ex): –1 penalty on attack rolls in bright sunlight or within radius of a *daylight* spell.

Possessions: Halfspear, studded leather armor, light crossbow, 10 bolts, pouch with 15 gp.

d Kobold War Leader: Male kobold Ftr5; CR 5; Small humanoid (reptilian); HD 5d10; hp 35; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (touch 13, flat-footed 17); Atk +8 melee (1d6+3, *+1 short sword*) or +6 ranged (1d8/19–20, light crossbow); SQ Darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 9, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Climb +1, Craft (trapmaking) +2, Hide +10, Listen +2, Move Silently +4, Search +2, Spot +2; Alertness, Dodge, Weapon Finesse (short sword), Weapon Focus (short sword), Weapon Specialization (short sword).

Light Sensitivity (Ex): –1 penalty on attack rolls in bright sunlight or within radius of a *daylight* spell.

Possessions: +1 short sword, chainmail, light crossbow, 10 bolts, pouch with 145 gp.

Development: The bad news is that Oppol, the leader of the Blackspear tribe, is not here. He took possession of the loot he found in the sphinx's lair. Then he took advantage of his sorcery to disguise himself, venture into a nearby town, and sell off what he can't use. You can use any city or town from your campaign world, or the example town provided below.

It's likely that the PCs believe they have fulfilled their quest and as a result return to the place where they met the ghost sphinx. Ujaset appears to tell them that they've failed him, and he reminds them that it was a sorcerer that slew him!

The war leader and the sergeant both know where Oppol went. They can even describe Oppol's gnome disguise. If given the chance to surrender once it's clear that they've lost, either one will reveal the information in exchange for his life. For the more bloodthirsty heroes, *speak with dead* is an option. Otherwise, you may have to allow the characters to poke around the town and find some evidence of something unusual that leads them to Oppol.

Treasure: The warband has done a little bit of raiding, and has a total of 930 gp in mixed coins.

5. A Stop in Town

The focus of this encounter is to allow the characters to discover where Oppol has holed up in town. None of the town's official's, guards, or constables know of the sorcerer's entrance. The passage of a single gnome merchant made little impression on the town's defenders.

The merchants of the town are more helpful. Caramip, an exotic goods merchant, remembers a gnome matching the heroes's description. She didn't like the gnome: He was cold even to her, a fellow gnome! Other merchants, including the money-changer Saul, report similar experiences with Oppol.

Potter Holm, one of the town's blacksmiths, has more to offer. The PC's learn from him that the gnome commissioned the construction of a number of masterwork weapons—mostly spears and swords. The weapons are to be delivered to a house at the edge of town.

The Small Town of Miel

The community in which the PCs encounter Oppol is the town of Miel (or a name more appropriate to your campaign). The town follows the rules noted for a settlement of its size in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* on page 137.

c Miel (small town): Conventional; AL N; gp limit 800 gp; Assets 56800 gp; Population 1425; Mixed (human 75, halfling 9, elf 5, dwarf 7, gnome 2, half-elf 1, half orc 1).

Authority Figures: Mayor Natal Miel, male human Com7.

Important Characters: Juliet Ghehan, female human War9 (constable); Ujar Tilok, male human Clr8 (Pelor, healer); Potter Holm, male half-elf Exp8 (blacksmith); Saul Regarson, male elf Exp4 (merchant); Caramip Loopmottin (merchant).

6. Sorcerer's House (EL 5)

Kobolds are clever trapmakers, and Oppol is no different for that. However, he has the advantage of supplementing his ability to make traps with the power of sorcery.

The kobold's residence here is a plain one no different from any of those nearby. It's a two-story wooden building 30 feet square on both floors. The locked door to the house is of reinforced wood. It's also trapped.

s Strong Wooden Door: 2 in. thick; hardness 5; hp 20; AC 5; break DC 25.

a Cold Blast: CR 5; no attack roll necessary, 10-ft.-wide sphere (6d6); Reflex save (DC 17) halves; Search (DC 25); Disable Device (DC 25).

The first floor of the building is empty. A stair leads to the second floor and the next encounter.

7. Sorcerer's Lair (EL 8)

The staircase rises up into a hall with two rooms of roughly equal size. The doors are similar to the one outside, but are not locked or trapped.

Oppol lurks behind one door; the other room is empty.

> The 10-foot-by-15-foot chamber is the first you've seen that shows use. A small bed lies against one wall, decorated with thick colorful blankets. A decorated pot lies next to the bed, while the wooden floor is covered with furs of bear and wolf.

Just what else the PCs see depends on how quiet they've been. With a few rounds to prepare, Oppol may be invisible or simply hiding.

Creatures: Oppol the sorcerer.

d Oppol: Male kobold Sor8; CR 8; Small humanoid (reptilian); HD 8d4+16; hp 33; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (touch 13, flat-footed 12); Atk +2 melee (1d4, dagger) or +5 ranged (1d4, dagger); SA Spells; SQ 60-ft. darkvision, light sensitivity; AL LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +6; Str 6, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 16.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +10, Craft (trapmaking) +2, Hide +8, Knowledge (arcana) +2, Listen +2, Move Silently +2, Search +2, Spellcraft +4, Spot +2; Alertness, Dodge, Scribe Scroll.

Light Sensitivity (Ex): –1 penalty on attack rolls in bright sunlight or within radius of a *daylight* spell.

Spells Known (6/7/7/6/3; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0—*daze, detect magic, flare, ghost sound, mage hand, open/close, ray of frost, read magic;* 1st—*cause fear, change self, expeditious retreat, mage armor, magic missile;* 2nd—*alter self, invisibility, web;* 3rd—*lightning bolt*, *summon monster III;* 4th—*cone of cold.*

Possessions: Cloak of Charisma +2, potion of cure serious wounds, pouch with 250 gold pieces.

Tactics: Oppol prepares for the fight with the casting of *mage armor, expeditious retreat,* and *invisibility.* Thereafter, he takes up a position on one corner of the room and unloads the offensive firepower of his 3rd- and 4th-level spells. At that point the PCs must quickly put an end to Oppol before his damage potential is realized.

Development: If Oppol sees the battle go against him, the sorcerer flees, jumping out a window if necessary. At the first opportunity he uses his illusion spells to disappear into the town's traffic.

Treasure: Oppol carries most of his treasure on him. The room's contents can be resold for 200 gp should the characters take the time to loot it. Finally, if the PCs claim the masterwork weapons that Potter is making, they can be resold for 2,400 gp.

CONCLUSIONS

If the heroes fail to avenge Ujaset, they may be haunted until they can find powerful priests to exorcise the ghost. If the heroes fail to slay Oppal but manage not to get killed by him, they may enlist some of the town's guard to assist them. If they succeed—and they successfully solved the ghost sphinx's riddle—the sphinx reveals the location of the stash in its lair. They can find a suit of (nonmagical) elven chain left there years ago.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Eckelberry left behind the study of abnormal mental psychologies in order to study some really interesting fantasies in the roleplaying industry. Since then, he's enjoyed working as either designer and editor on all of the Wizards of the Coast roleplaying product lines, especially ALTERNITY, FORGOTTEN REALMS, and D&D.